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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to gain insight into the process that facilitates emancipatory education. The sample consisted of 24 Caucasian middle-class women who had experienced a transformation of consciousness related to women's issues and who were acting for the structural change of society through communications, politics, religion, or education. The women were identified through books and journals and networking. Data were gathered through open-ended interviews and a review of literature on emancipatory education, developmental psychology, and feminism. The data and literature review ascertained three prominent themes: (1) emancipatory learning and its facilitators are grounded in an experience of praxis that leads to social change; (2) both a psychological and a culture identity change may be part of emancipatory learning; and (3) women's psychological development and way of knowing may involve an experience of relatedness that is enhanced by intuitive activity. The findings of the study suggest that the essence of emancipatory learning for these women change agents was a transformation in their way of knowing. These women came to own an integrated knowing centered in an experience of the authentic self. When this knowing was grounded in a context of relatedness, new knowledge that critiqued dominant society was created. This knowledge then motivated them to act for social reconstruction. The implications of the study for educational practice include a challenge to adult educators to consider the experience of women in educational programs. Educators need to create opportunities where women can publicly name their alienating experiences and contribute to the reconstruction of educational systems. Another implication is that educators should encourage women to value their experience and to use that experience. Finally, educators should encourage the construction of knowledge that reflects an intuitive sense. (Contains 23 references.) (KC)

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EMANCIPATORY LEARNING OF CHANGE AGENTS: CONTEXT & DESCRIPTION

Kathleen A. Loughlin

Adult educators working within the critical paradigm identify the interrelationship between the individual and society as central to their conception of education. They envision their role as facilitators of an educational process that leads to social change (Merriam, 1991, pp. 52-53). While a body of knowledge that explores the nature of this educational process-- emancipatory education--is emerging (Apps, 1985; Freire, 1973, 1982, 1983; Greene, 1978, 1986, 1990; Hart, 1990; Mezirow, 1985, 1990, 1991), the literature does not comprehensively develop the process of how to facilitate emancipatory education.

The purpose of the study presented in this article was to gain insight into that process which facilitates emancipatory education. To realize this aim, I designed a qualitative study that sought to understand the facilitators of the emancipatory learning experiences of twenty-four social change agents. These change agents were women who had experienced a transformation of consciousness which influenced their commitment to act for the reconstruction of society.

The sample consisted of twenty-four Caucasian middle-class women who had experienced a transformation

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of consciousness related to women's issues. The criteria for selection included each woman's possessing a reflective awareness of her individual consciousness-raising process and an ability to articulate that process. Additionally, each woman was acting for structural change of society through the fields of communications, politics, religion, or education. I used public sources, such as books and journals, and networking to identify the women. After an initial contact with a potential participant, I sent her a description of the study's purpose and the criteria for the sample. Thus, participant judgment facilitated selection. Lastly, the interview schedule probed for a transformation of consciousness within an emancipatory process as an additional guarantee that the women reflected the criteria of the study.

Data was gathered using a field-tested semi-structured open-ended interview schedule. Structured questions were designed around the topics: perceptions of self, before and after consciousness-raising; catalytic events related to consciousness-raising; and formal and informal learning experiences that facilitated the transformation of consciousness.

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The transcribed interviews were analyzed using a modified form of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To ensure credibility, the techniques of peer debriefing and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were used.

RELATED LITERATURE

Three themes--emancipatory education, developmental psychology, and feminism--guided the literature review. The literature review on emancipatory education suggested that an inquiry into the nature of emancipatory learning predominated as a theme. In the literature, facilitators of emancipatory learning were integral components of the emancipatory learning experiences, themselves. For example, an understanding of facilitators--such as the role of generative themes (Freire, 1982) and rational discourse (Mezirow, 1991)--is embedded in an analysis of the nature of the emancipatory learning process. Therefore, a purpose of the literature review was to explore the nature of "emancipatory learning experiences" to gain insight into the facilitating process.

The literature suggests that emancipatory educators have been most notably influenced by Jurgen Habermas (1971). These educators broadly interpret emancipatory

learning as learning "which frees people from personal, institutional, or environmental forces that prevent them from seeing new directions, from gaining control of their lives, their society and their world" (Apps, 1985, p. 151).

While the thoughts of emancipatory educators such as Freire (1982), Greene (1978, 1990), and Mezirow (1985, 1990, 1991) differ in their definition of action for social change, these educators do agree on the centrality of praxis as a way of knowing that includes reflection and action. For Freire and Greene, praxis necessarily involves direct action for social change. Greene's (1978) understanding, which is consonant with Freire's, describes praxis as "critical reflection--and action upon--a situation to some degree shared by persons with common interests and common needs. . . . praxis involves a transformation of that situation to the end of overcoming oppressiveness and domination" (p. 100). Similarly, Mezirow (1990) views praxis as critical self-reflection and action. He, however, asserts that praxis can also include action for "sociolinguistic, epistemic and psychological" change which may then lead to social change (1991, pp. 209-211).

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A specific form of emancipatory learning, consciousness-raising, is derived from Freire's (1982) methodology of conscientizacao. Consciousness-raising, Hart (1990) states, is "a process of reclaiming social membership--not in the sense of adjusting to the normative view that produced a situation of marginality in the first place but in terms that tend to abolish all special claims and privileges for any identifiable social group" (p. 70).

Rivera's exploration of the adult change process provides insight into this "process of reclaiming social membership." Rivera (1972) asserts that adults who have experienced both a psychological and a cultural identity change tend to assume roles as change agents for social reconstruction (pp. 57-63). Mezirow (1991) is the most explicit of emancipatory educators in connecting both dimensions of this change process. He specifically identifies a type of praxis that includes action for "psychological" change. This type of action, Mezirow postulates, may lead to social change, even "if only very indirectly" (p. 211).

A review of developmental and educational psychology literature provided additional insight into the meaning

of this change process. Cell (1984) and Kegan (1982) were identified as theorists who have specifically addressed this relationship between individuals' psychological development and their action for social change. Similar to the thought of emancipatory educators, Cell (1984) identifies reflection as the source of individuals' ability "to love, make commitments, strive for justice, create culture" (p. 59). He, however, amplifies the understanding of reflection to include being psychologically centered, "deriving our beliefs from our own experience" (p. 20).

While Cell describes centering as individuals' ability to be self-defined, Kegan (1982) explores the psychological aspects of self-definition. The organizing principle of meaning-making, he asserts, is the developmental relationship between the knower and the known. Furthermore, Kegan postulates that individuals may define themselves as autonomous (Stage 4) or interdependent (Stage 5) in relationship to society. It is from this stance as knowers that they are able to know society critically and act for social change (pp. 100-110).

Kegan's incorporation of an alternating movement

between autonomy and interdependence addresses feminist critique of mainstream developmental theory. For example, Gilligan (1982) and Chodorow (1987) critique the emphasis that psychological theory traditionally puts on autonomy to the exclusion of valuing interdependence and relatedness.

Both Gilligan (1982) and Chodorow (1987) identify a sense of relatedness as characteristic of women's psychological development. Belenky et al. (1986) reframe this experience of relatedness into the concept of "passionate knowing." This way of knowing integrates the use of reason, an objective separate relating to the known, with intuition, a subjective connected relating to the known (p. 141). Intuition is specifically identified by Noddings and Shore (1984) as an enhancer of related knowing. Although they do not frame their discussion in a feminist context, Noddings and Shore suggest that intuition facilitates a relational knowing characterized by an integration of Will, intellect, and affect.

In summary, the literature review ascertained three prominent themes. First, emancipatory learning and its facilitators are grounded in an experience of praxis which leads to social change. Second, both a

psychological and culture identity change may be part of emancipatory learning. Third, women's psychological development and way of knowing may involve an experience of relatedness which is enhanced by intuitive activity. These themes are reflected in the definintions and assumptions of the study.

DEFINITIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

Emancipatory learning was defined in this study as learning that demystifies personal and social realities and leads to action for social change. Four assumptions underlie the design of the study. First, particular women who are acting as social change agents may have experienced consciousness-raising as identified by Freire (1982). Consciousness-raising, defined in this study, is a transformation of consciousness that includes an experience of praxis: reflection and action leading to social change. Implicit in this assumption is the belief that consciousness-raising may be a specific form of emancipatory learning.

Second, the reconstruction of society may be facilitated by actions within diverse societal contexts; for example, the media, politics, religious institutions, or educational institutions. For this study, action for

social reconstruction was defined as action within these contexts that reflects a structural analysis of society and contributes to a change in societal structures. The remaining two interrelated assumptions were developed from my experience. The first is that consciousness-raising may be facilitated in both formal and informal educational settings. Second, emancipatory learning may be facilitated by an educator. These four assumptions informed the design of the research.

FINDINGS

The data primarily revealed a description of the emancipatory learning process, although the original purpose of the study was to identify the facilitators of emancipatory learning. The absence of facilitators in the data resulted from an erroneous assumption that was reflected in the design of the interview schedule. This assumption was that the emancipatory learning these women experienced was facilitated by an educator in formal and informal educational settings. The data proved that this assumption was false for these women. The findings of the study did include 1) an identification of the context of these women's emancipatory learning, and 2) a description of an emancipatory learning process: consciousness-

raising.

The Context of Emancipatory Learning

The theme that emerged from the data was that learning in formal and informal educational contexts was not the primary context of emancipatory learning. To the inquiry about emancipatory learning in these contexts, the majority of the women responded that their learning experiences as adults in formal educational settings were alienating, rather than emancipatory. For example, Ronnie, a psychologist and educator whose writings have contributed to a feminist revision of developmental theory, described her alienation.

> [In formal education experiences] my standard feelings were I don't have a voice here, I'm not smart, I can't figure out how they're doing it . . . in spite of relative success throughout my education, just not getting it, not feeling like it made a lot of sense.

Similar to Ronnie's reflection, Edith, a co-founder of an international educational center for developing a new world order, shared her sense of alienation:

> After going back to school, it can get lonesome... there's a whole side of ways of knowing that are not generally addressed in the academy. . . . you feel that whole parts of you are left out most times when I'm back at school. I just feel like I'm spiritually starving because I have to leave out whole parts of me in the process which are very important to me.

Those women who did not speak of formal education as alienating, also did not speak of it as emancipatory. Rather they described the intellectual contribution made by the academy. Miriam, a feminist political scientist who writes of the interrelationship between feminism and peace, identified this position:

> In terms of formal education, I would say that, although I had some courses and some teachers that I thought were disasters, but for the most part I really think I learned an enormous amount.

Women's consciousness-raising groups were the primary informal educational experiences of which the women spoke. Four of the twenty-four women had been members of women's consciousness-raising groups. Two identified these learning experiences as emancipatory. For example, Tina, an advocate for minority and imprisoned women, recalled the empowerment of her group.

> Everyone was incredibly honest and the whole premise of consciousness-raising of allowing someone, enabling someone into speech was exactly what happened.

Ronnie, on the other hand, identified this empowerment within her group, but she described her experience differently.

> That group of women then met for the next three or four years as a group and although I don't remember having a sort of "aha" or going through a rage

particularly, I certainly watched everyone else go through it.

When the data revealed that emancipatory learning in formal and informal educational contexts was not a predominant theme, I sought to identify an inclusive context that would recognize the diverse experiences of which the women spoke. These emancipatory experiences, for example, included reading feminist literature for some, transcendental literature for others; developing personal relationships with other women; and experiencing personal trauma. Therefore, concrete life experiences in which the women were significantly affected by their interactions with others emerged as the inclusive descriptor of the primary context for their emancipatory learning.

An Emancipatory Learning Process: Consciousness-Raising

The data suggest that consciousness-raising, a specific form of emancipatory learning, involved a praxis of owning authentic knowing that was grounded in a context of relatedness and then acting for social reconstruction.

Authentic Knowing

The definition of authentic knowing inferred in the

data is an integrated knowing that is centered in an experience of the authentic self. As suggested in the data, the presence of a woman's authentic self is the experience of an intuitive sense that manifests itself within life experiences. The descriptor "authentic" represents a woman's authorship of the knowledge she creates when she has listened to the voice of the authentic self and integrated it with the voice of reason. Adrienne, a feminist leader in women's religious communities who has challenged hierarchal religious structures nationally and internationally, spoke of that knowing as "a growing sense of my own authority--the authoring of one's life." It is exclusively this sense of authoring to which the descriptor "authentic" refers.

The presence of the authentic self in knowing, for example, was expressed by Joyce, a commissioner of parole working to reconstruct the state penal system. She recalled her early awareness of the influence of her authentic self in knowing.

> My family is Jewish and I consider myself from a Jewish background. But the formal education I had with that which was summer camps and an attempt at Sunday school. I railed against it because it was a very, very affluent Jewish community. And I confused the religious beliefs with the value systems which of course is all wrong. And I knew it

> at the time, but I just knew I didn't fit in. So consequently I didn't pursue a life of being a traditional housewife, joining a country club, and living in a style to which I was groomed.

Joyce describes the voice of her authentic self with the words "but I just knew I didn't fit in." It was in owning that voice and integrating it with the voice of reason that guided her subsequent actions.

Similarly, Susan, an educator facilitating social justice seminars, also spoke of experiencing the presence of her authentic self at the time she decided to pursue a doctoral program.

> When I decided to continue for my doctorate, I knew I would have to find a program that fit. My interests were ethics, psychology, and sociology and most programs were defined by disciplines. What I was involved in seemed to fall between the cracks of the various disciplines. So I looked and found an opportunity to design an interdisciplinary program that was independent learning. This was very important because I knew it fit.

Becoming aware of this intuitive sense of knowing--Susan's knowing "it fit"--is the beginning of owning authentic knowing. In essence, the transformation of consciousness that characterized the emancipatory learning of the women in the study was an enduring ownership of that self as the center of their knowing. The enduring ownership of this self is echoed in Anne's

description of the "inner sense" that characterized her present learning. Anne, a grassroots activist within the women's health care movement, formerly viewed learning as purely rational. She spoke ofthe change she experienced. "I guess you can say that booklearning's become a footnote in my learning. Now it'svery important for me--all of me--my whole person is partof. I just have this inner sense within me . . . AndI pay attention to this."

The importance of owning the presence of the authentic self as suggested in the lives of the women in the study is that this ownership creates the possibility for a woman to acknowledge the value of intuition in her knowing. When a woman owns her intuitive knowing, she has the opportunity to integrate the knowledge of reason with the knowledge of intuition. Trudy, a feminist theologian who is founder of an international consciousness-raising organization, spoke of her ownership of intuition and the integration in her knowing.

> Earlier I continued to tolerate the difference between academic theology [emphasis on reason] and training for ministry [emphasis on relational and intuitive knowing]. And it was only a little later that I began to see that was a false dichotomy based

> on a dualism I did not share . . . I became aware that was a false split so I very intentionally wrote a dissertation that said: "But this ought not be." Now in my experience and in my unique situation, the process [of knowing] has been very integrated.

This integration of reason and intuition in knowing is identified by Belenky et al. (1986) as "passionate knowing" in which there is an "opening of the mind and heart to embrace the world" (p. 141).

A Context of Relatedness

The data also suggest that while these women's knowing changed to become centered (Cell, 1984) in their authentic self, this knowing was not individualistic. Their ability to know authentically and to envision possibilities emerged within an experience of praxis "the kind of knowing that surpasses and transforms, that makes a difference in reality" (Greene, 1978, p. 18). Their experience of authentic knowing which led to transformative action in society was grounded in a context of relatedness.

A context of relatedness, the data suggest, is a context characterized by a woman's connective interacting with others. The identifier--"relatedness" (Chodorow, 1987)--emphasizes a woman's underlying psychic presence that may form the basis of the connective interacting

among women. A context of relatedness appears to create the opportunity for a woman to connect her individual knowing with the experiences of others and public issues.

Patricia, for example, is a philosopher who has contributed to the creation of feminist peace politics. She described the centeredness of her knowing and her psychic relatedness to the experiences of mothers in society.

> I began to try to develop a perspective though it is feminist, but it is rooted in the life I lead as a woman, which I had previously thought the whole problem was that I was too caught up in that life as a woman.

She continued and described the context of relatedness--her psychic connection to the experience of mothers:

> My commitment to women became also a specialized commitment to mothers. . . that was where my passion was to the rights and needs and perspectives of mothers because I think mothers are treated with such contempt.

The words of the women studied suggested that this context can be a connective interacting with the lives of people whose life experiences they have internalized as is reflected in Patricia's words. This context can also be a connective interacting with others who are physically present. Tina, an advocate for minority and imprisoned woman, described this type of context of

relatedness:

> And one woman in particular who was a good friend of mine--I think we talked about what it meant to be black and white. We struggled a lot and she was probably most influential in my really understanding it. . . And I think that particular issue of racism helped me to come close to my own identification of feeling whatever that feeling was of oppression. Somehow they are very connected.

Patricia's and Tina's descriptions of a context of relatedness were representative of the experiences of each woman in the study. In all instances, a context of relatedness created an opportunity for a woman to connect her individual knowing with the experiences of others and public issues.

Action for Social Change

The reflections of these women studied suggest that their knowing of themselves and their world authentically in a context of relatedness motivated them to act. This action was a critique of the dominant culture and then concrete action on their new knowledge. This knowledge became "the motivating force for their liberating action" (Freire, 1982, p. 34).

These women acted in different societal contexts, but they shared a commitment to acts of societal reconstruction that were concrete, physical actions.

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Theresa, an educator whose reading primarily influenced her own emancipatory learning, spoke of the importance of concrete action. "I have to figure out the most concrete things that I can do. You know, then you try to break it down to something concrete--inglorious things." The concrete actions which the women of this study undertook were: public discourse, political action, or emancipatory education.

Several women acted through public discourse to communicate the knowledge they had created. For these women, their commitment to social change is realized through the power of the word. Edith, author, educator, and co-founder of an international education organization, was representative of these women.

> I feel my contribution to structural change is in the writing field. In the writing, and editing in the field of publications or speaking . . . and also in consciousness raising or education related to structural understanding of systems and structural change. But when I see structural change I don't see it as some vacuum out there. It really has to do with what's going on with people's minds and hearts. It's not just an external thing in the world. It's something harder. In some way, I suppose, some of our work is about conversion, as much as it is about external systems.

A second type of action for social change revealed in the data is political action. These women's political

actions included seeking public office, lobbying, and advocating for the rights of women within governmental channels. For example, Louise, a lawyer, became motivated to seek public office when her knowing led her to critique the laws designed to protect the rights and well-being of victims, particularly the battered women she represented.

> I wanted to do something with my life. I wanted to do something more constructive. I was dealing with the results of policies. And my feeling was that somehow if the only way that you could change these policies was to do this. Then you run for office. I have to tell you I didn't know where to start. I would have run for city council, assembly, the senate, anything. I wanted to run for anything. I wanted to run to make a difference.

The realization of her efforts was her election to a legislature which allowed her the opportunity to influence the passage of laws to promote women's rights.

Lastly, women in the study were acting in educational institutions to facilitate individuals' critical understanding of their lives as influenced by history and culture. Theresa, philosopher and educator, described the educational process that characterized the concrete action of several women in the study.

> I'm very, very strong on a participative knowing and a kind of caring and/or concern and acting on it. . . . We want to empower students. We want to empower

> them to do things that are meaningful and that they understand what is within their scope. And I suppose that you can hope that if we can create an increasingly large population of people who won't just sit there, but will find little things to do, maybe that will help us to create a public space.

The concrete actions of each women in this study through public discourse, political action, or emancipatory education manifested the underlying knowledge they had created authentically in a context of relatedness.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study suggest that the essence of emancipatory learning for these women change agents was a transformation in their way of knowing. These women came to own an integrated knowing centered in an experience of the authentic self. This knowing when grounded in a context of relatedness created new knowledge which critiqued dominant society. This knowledge, then, motivated them to act for social reconstruction.

The implications for practice suggested by this study include a challenge to adult educators to consider the experience of women in our educational programs. For those women who experience educational systems as

alienating, educators need to create opportunities where women can publicly name those alienating experiences and contribute to the reconstruction of educational systems. Also, adult educators have traditionally spoken of theimportance of respecting the experiences of learners. The women in this study, while their number was limited, suggest that concrete life experience was the primary context of their emancipatory learning. This finding may speak to the importance of encouraging women, especially, tovalue their experiences and to use that experience as a"living textbook" (Lindeman, 1984, p. 20).

Lastly, a significant implication of the study is the invitation to reflect on the type of knowledge that is facilitated and valued within our educational institutions. The importance of intuition and relational knowing in facilitating emancipatory learning suggests that logic may be only one of many ways to guide the construction of knowledge. Encouraging the construction of knowledge that reflects an intuitive sense, especially in relationship to the needs and experiences of others may create new approaches to the complexities of contemporary society.

In conclusion, this study is limited in both the

size and composition of the sample. The findings, however, represent a beginning in exploring the experience of women in educational institutions and in exploring the nature of emancipatory education.

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